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Front cover. Stone slab A3 used as a paving slab in Temple 4, Qasr Ibrim, showing Taharqa and Amun (photograph courtesy of F. Aldsworth).

Above. Frontal scan of lion head, Naga (Kroeper and Perzlmeier 2022, fig. 21, © Naga Project, 3-D scans by TrigonArt BauerPraus GbR).

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Salvage excavations in the Berber-Abidiya Region, 1999: a post-Meroitic single descendary, two-entrance tomb in el-Fereikha

Julie Anderson, Salah Mohammed Ahmed and Mahmoud Suliman Bashir

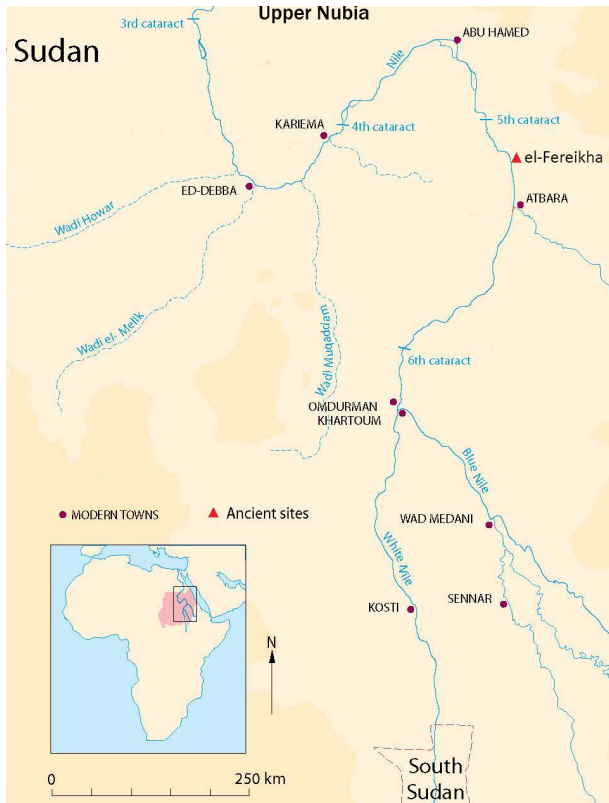


Figure 1. Map showing the location of el-Fereikha.



Figure 2. Post-Meroitic tomb el-Fereikha 5/97 with grave contents *in situ*.

In 1997, rescue excavations were undertaken by the Berber-Abidiya Archaeological Project¹ in a street in el-Fereikha, a village located on the east bank of the Nile approximately 16km north of Berber and 1km north of the more recently excavated Meroitic temple of Dangeil in River Nile State. There a trench dug for a water pipe had cut through the southern descendary/ramp of a double-descendary, early post-Meroitic tomb (BAAP 5/97) disturbing its fill (Figures 1 and 2). The tomb contents, consisting solely of ceramics, were found *in situ* associated with the very fragmentary remains of an adult and child. The environmental conditions had not been conducive for the preservation of organic materials (Salah Mohammed Ahmed and Anderson 2000, 20, 22-23; Anderson and Salaheldin Mohammed Ahmed 2002). A reconnaissance of the village and nearby area uncovered red brick fragments and pot sherds suggesting the presence of additional Meroitic and/or post-Meroitic tombs; however, no traces of such a cemetery were visible on the surface.

Few post-Meroitic tombs of this type have been documented thus far and it is hoped herein to contribute further to this corpus.² Analogous examples of tombs with double-descendaries have been discovered at Meroe, Akad in ed-Damer and Kankar, north of Berber and their use seems to be restricted to this region, although as the sample size is small this may not be a valid assumption. It is uncertain how many tombs of this type were excavated by J. Garstang in the Meroe cemetery in the area he described as the middle group of the necropolis (see Garstang *et al.* 1911, 29-36). Some of these graves appear to have been covered by low tumuli. Garstang states, 'In the second group [of

¹ At this time the Berber-Abidiya Archaeological Project was a joint Sudanese-Canadian mission under the auspices of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, Sudan.

² For a comprehensive discussion of post-Meroitic tomb typology see Mahmoud el-Tayib 2010, 1-9. See also Edwards 2004a; 2004b, 182-211 especially 185-191 and Lenoble 2004a; 2004b.

tombs] 300-399 which we call ring tombs, the entrance was generally gained by a pair of parallel passages' (1911, 33). Some graves, such as Tomb 3, were accessed by a single descendary but had two entrances into the tomb chamber. This tomb was also covered by a tumulus comprised of stone (Garstang *et al.* 1911, 29, pl. XXXVi no. 4). Tombs 303 and 307 (Garstang *et al.* 1911, pls XXXIX and XL), for example, exhibit two descendaries with openings into the tomb chamber blocked by a variety of materials, objects and architectural fragments in reuse. He further notes that the black pottery in these tombs is of fine quality often with incised decoration filled with white paste. Iron weapons, quivers and archer's looses were among the grave goods. Five double-descendary tombs were excavated at Akad (nos 8, 21, 25, 29 and 31) (Mohamed Faroug Abdelrahman 2009; Mohamed Faroug Abd el-Rahman 2011; Mohamed Faroug and Tsakos 2005; Mohamed Faroug *et al.* 2007, 98-101, figs 1, 2;) and one was discovered at Kankar (Lenoble 1991a, 167-181) containing grave goods of a similar nature. Mahmoud el-Tayeb (2010, 4) notes that the rich grave goods associated with this tomb type seems to indicate the individuals interred within belonged to an elite group or class within post-Meroitic society.

Reconnaissance in el-Fereikha, 1999

In addition to Tomb 5/97 mentioned above, another post-Meroitic tomb with vessels (later designated 1/97) was discovered during the construction of the foundations of a village mosque in 1992 in el Fereikha (Salah Mohamed Ahmed 1993) (Figure 3). Fragments of Christian tombstones were also found in the north-east area of this mosque and a fired brick bearing a graffito in Greek reading *MNHA* was discovered within the village further to the north (Salah el-din Mohamed Ahmed and Anderson 2000, 20-21, fig. 2). During the 1999 season³ further efforts were made to define the extent of the post-Meroitic cemetery located beneath el-Fereikha although the modern houses and lack of tomb superstructures and surface indications made this difficult. Fired bricks uncovered during the excavation of a new cesspit in the



Figure 3. Google Earth image showing the locations of el-Fereikha mosque 1/97, post-Meroitic Tombs 5/97 and 3/99, 1999 Trial Trenches 1-3 and Cemeteries WTC and FRC.

³ Excavations and survey were conducted in el-Fereikha, Dangeil and in Berber from 24th February to 5th April, 1999. The team included Salah Mohammed Ahmed, Julie Anderson, Gassim Hassan Naser, the late Salah Omer Al Sadig, Yassin Mohamed Saeed, and Hammad Ibrahim Ahmed (NCAM driver). The authors would also like to thank Diana Harlow for her assistance in preparing the images for this paper and the peer reviewers for their helpful comments.

courtyard of a house situated to the north-west of the mosque was reported to the team and investigated.⁴ Several fired brick fragments and a few non-diagnostic pot sherds were seen in part of a tomb chamber, but the site (BAAP 2/99) was not further examined as the cesspit was in use. The bricks appear to have come from a blockage closing the entry into the tomb. The site may be tentatively identified as a post-Meroitic grave.

Three trial squares (TT1: 6m x 8m; TT2: 5m x 4m; TT3: 8m x 8m)⁵ were opened in a courtyard between 10m and 60m directly north of Tomb 5/97. The modern surfaces were removed and underlying layers cleaned to check for indications of tombs. These sondages yielded little results and no signs of ancient occupation or cemetery use were found. To summarise, the surface of each square was flat and featureless. A recent pit and *jalous* wall with a foundation cut was found under the modern surface in Trench 1. A mixture of earth and animal dung lay beneath the courtyard surface in Trench 2. Postholes, possibly part of a former shelter, were found in Trench 3. The fill of the post holes included wood, charcoal and modern pot sherds.

Tomb 3/99

During reconnaissance of the village, we were informed that following the rainy season in 1996, a lorry had become stuck and sunk into a deep hole in the road running beside the modern cemetery. The hole was approximately 2m in diameter. After removal of the accumulated modern debris (Context 10) in and around the hole, it became clear that the lorry had collapsed part of the roof of a burial chamber and a salvage excavation was initiated. There were no surface indications or superstructure to suggest that a tomb was present. The tomb was situated directly west of *Estrahat el-Humri*, a cemetery rest house named after Mohamed Abdel Magid Mohamed el-Humri, and was approximately 150m south of BAAP 1/97, the el-Fereikha mosque (Figures 4 and 5).⁶ It was designated 3/99.

A 3mx4m square was opened over the hole and excavation of the chamber was conducted through the hole in order to gain an idea of the grave's orientation and disposition. A layer of roof tumble was removed under which lay a fine-textured sandy earth fill devoid of inclusions. The tomb chamber was oval measuring 2.6m east-west and 6.2m north-south, and originally was 1.7m high. It was similar in shape to that of BAAP 5/97, although slightly smaller (Figures 6 and 7). Two entrances were found on the east side of the chamber. Both were rectangular in shape with the south cut measuring 1.08m x 0.98m and the north being 0.98m x 0.68m (Figures 8 and 9). An irregular lens of complete fired bricks (340mm x 180mm x 70mm) and half bricks mixed with the tomb earth fill lay beneath the north entrance suggesting it had been blocked and brick fragments were visible in the fill of the door. No evidence for a door blockage was found in the south opening but this may have remained undiscovered as it was not possible to proceed further eastward, for safety reasons.

The organic material in the tomb (bone and wood) was largely reduced to powder, and the grave goods were fragmentary and found in disarray. The ceramics were post-Meroitic in date. Small bone fragments and powder (Context 19) lay beneath pieces of a libation vessel (^99-1) and a conical black spindle whorl (^99-8) was found on top of powdery traces of a wooden beam (^99-9) (Figures 10 and 11). More bone powder (Context 20) was situated beneath the north door and associated with numerous faience and glass beads, some gilded (^99-3, ^99-4, ^99-5, ^99-6, ^99-7) (Figures 6 and 7). Based on the grave goods and

⁴ Contemporary with the reconnaissance in el-Fereikha, a survey of monuments in Berber was undertaken by the late Salah Omer Al Sadig and Gassim Hassan Naser. Berber was given the general designation BAAP 1/99 with individual monuments further delineated (see Salah Omer Al Sadig 2006). An initial cartographic survey of Dangeil (12/97) was carried out by Yassin Mohamed Saeed.

⁵ Measurements north-south by east-west.

⁶ See further Salah Mohammed Ahmed 1993; Salah el-Din Mohamed Ahmed and Anderson 2000, 17.



Figure 4. View north from Cemetery WTC towards the *Estrahat el-Humri* with the el-Fereikha mosque 1/97 located under the red dot.



Figure 5. Tomb 3/99 at the start of excavation.

number of entrances, it is possible that two deceased female individuals were interred in the tomb; however, the human remains were too fragmentary to make any determination of sex, age or number of individuals.

To determine the type and length of the descendary into the tomb, two squares were opened adjacent to the rest house wall, one in the building's interior and one on the exterior, as the building itself could not be removed (Figure 12). Access to the tomb was gained via a single east-west orientated sloping descendary c. 3.5m in length with two steps at the east end (Figures 13 and 14). The fill of the ramp (Contexts 24 and 26) comprised loose sandy earth with dark gravel and grey-white subsoil inclusions. The tomb had been robbed in antiquity and a robber hole cut through the descendary's fill with access by the robbers being gained through the north door. As several of the ceramic sherds displayed tooth marks it appears that following the robbery in antiquity the tomb remained open for a time and was occupied by foxes. It also experienced extensive water damage following the lorry accident. Despite the poor state in

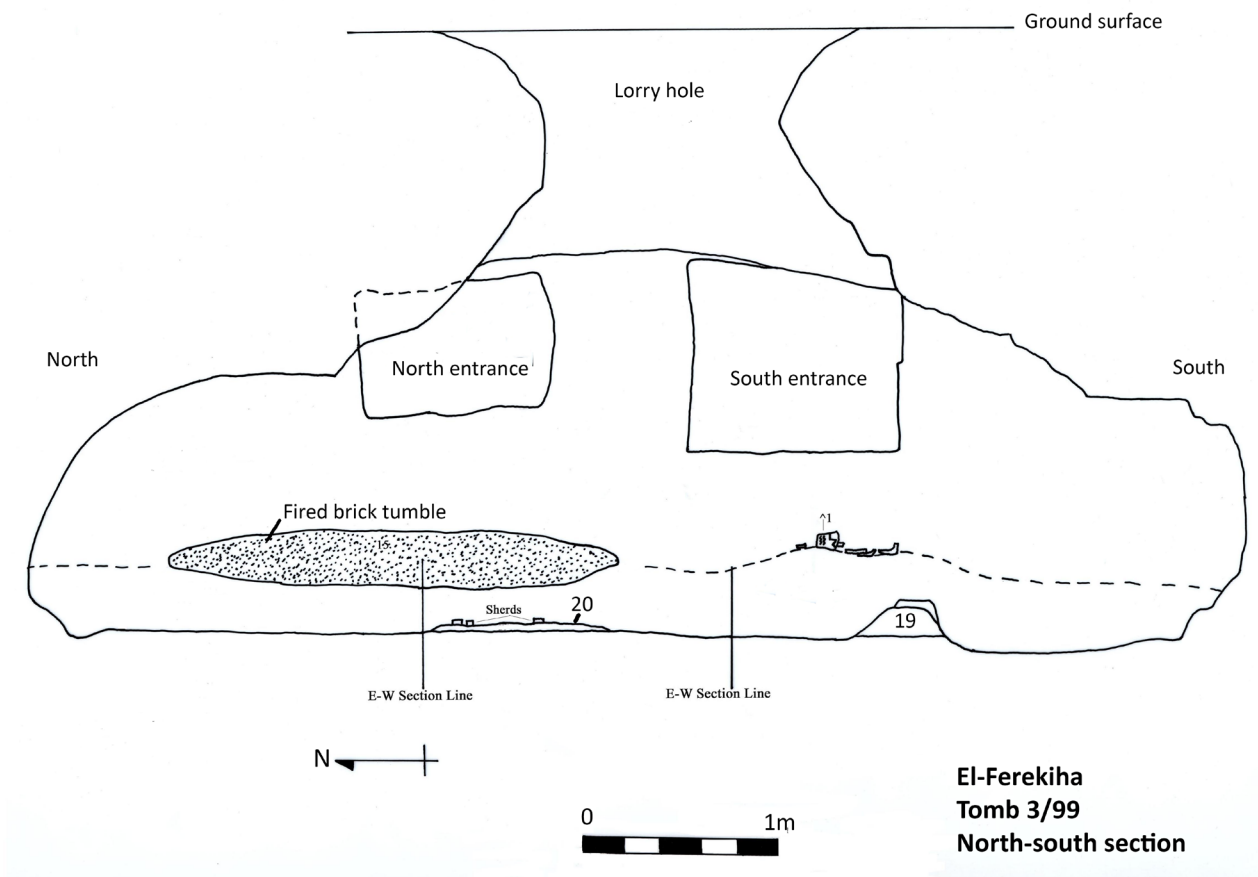


Figure 6. North-south section through the tomb chamber of 3/99.

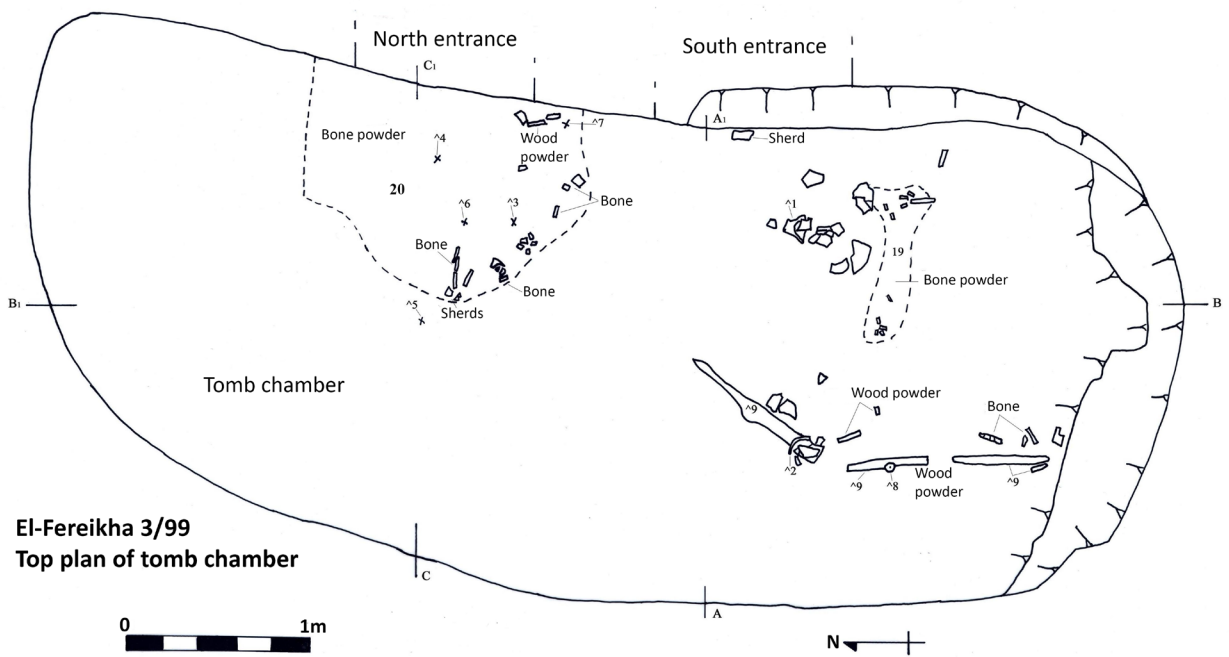


Figure 7. Top plan of the tomb chamber of 3/99.



Figure 8. North entrance into the tomb chamber, facing east.



Figure 9. South entrance into the tomb chamber, facing east.

which the tomb was found after the robbery, the grave goods, although fragmentary and scattered, suggest that it had been a richly endowed elite burial and the deceased well provided for in the afterlife.

The finds

The finds from Tomb 3/99 included ceramics, wood and beads. The findspots of objects [^]99-1 to [^]99-9 are shown in Figure 7. The ceramics, all fragmentary, included a libation bottle, bowl, cup and spindle whorl. All were handmade and the vessels were black-burnished. The libation bottle was globular in shape with a maximum diameter of 212mm and height of 211mm; rim diameter of 58.8mm and a thickness of 5mm ([^]99-1; Figures 10, 16, 17). Decoration around the upper neck consisted of four units containing three parallel elements of impressed zigzags filled with white paste. Some of the body fragments were missing and animal tooth marks were present on several sherds. This bottle is similar to Object 97-3 from Tomb 5/97 (Anderson and Salah eldin Mohamed Ahmed 2002, 17). A detailed discussion of these vessels may be found in Lenoble 1987, 96; 1991b, 246-252.

The slightly lopsided, flat-rimmed bowl ([^]99-2; Figure 18) had a diameter of 169mm, a maximum height of 84mm, and a rim thickness of 8mm. The base was slightly rounded and parts of the rim and body were missing. A thin groove (width 1mm) ran around the interior 4mm below the rim. The rim was decorated with four sets of impressed decoration placed equidistant around the rim. Each was 60mm long and consisted of a series of triangular wedges.

The cup ([^]99-10, Figure 19) had a rounded in-turned rim and a globular body. It was 70mm in diameter



Figure 10. Libation bottle ([^]99-10) *in situ*.



Figure 11. Spindle whorl ([^]99-8) *in situ* on top of wood fragments and powder ([^]99-9).

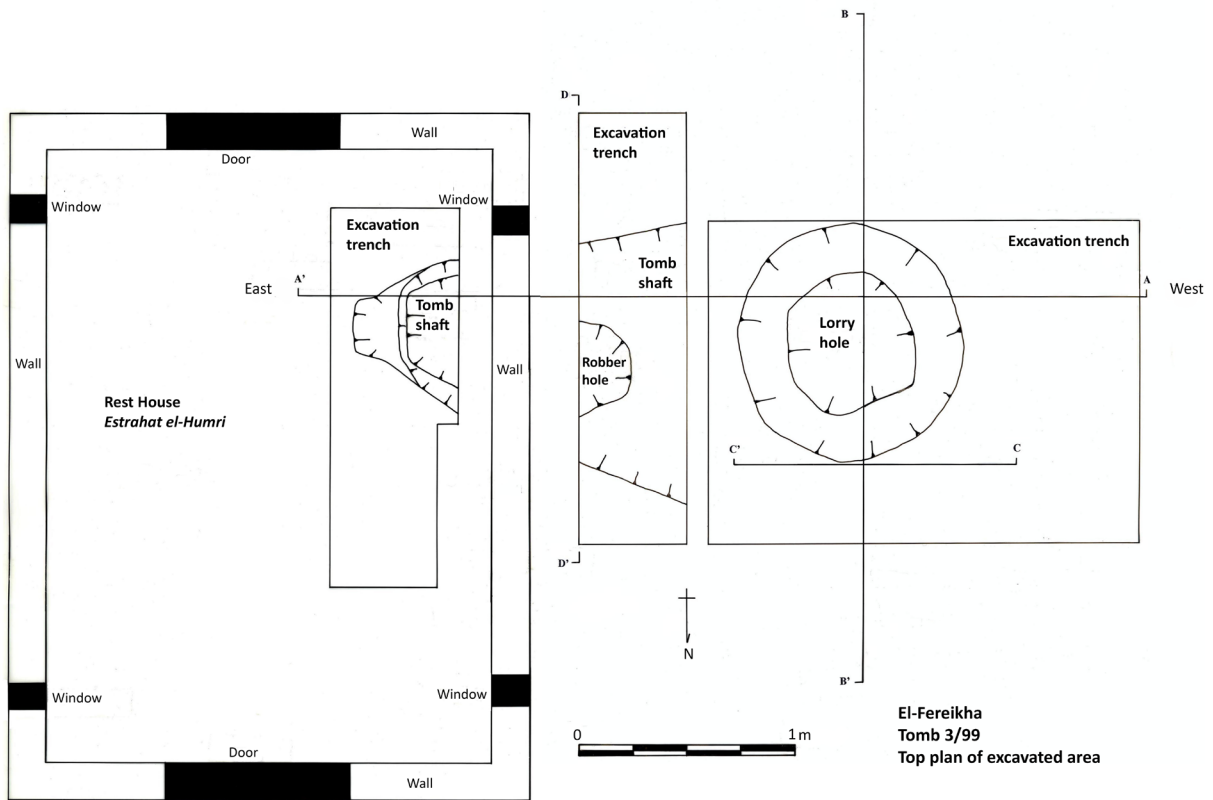


Figure 12. Top plan of excavated area.

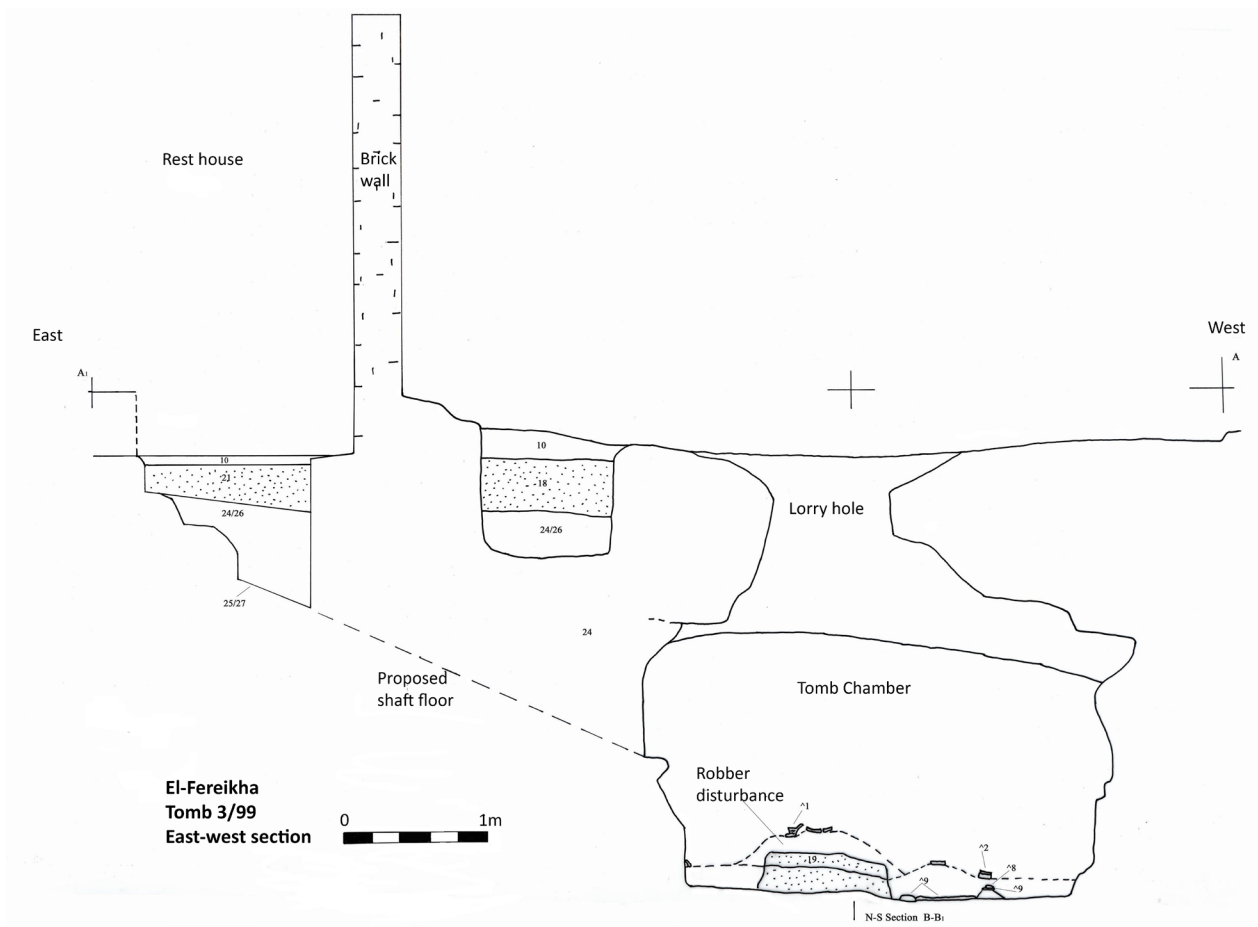


Figure 13. East-west section of excavated area.



Figure 14. East end of descandary facing west with rest house wall in the background.

and preserved to a height of 59mm with a rim thickness of 5mm. Impressed decoration on the exterior comprised of three vertical lines attached to two horizontal zigzag lines running around the rim. This was repeated four times. The interior of the cup was burnished around the rim. This vessel had been broken in antiquity and further dispersed by animals. Animal tooth marks were present on several sherds and the base and part of the rim were missing.

A poorly fired, cone-shaped spindle whorl with a hole pierced through its centre ([^]99-8; Figure 20) was found lying on top of traces of powdery wood ([^]99-9; Figure 11). The disc tapers

from the central hole down towards the edge, and it appears lozenge-shaped from the side. It was 45mm in diameter, 26mm thick and the hole was 5mm in diameter. The upper face was decorated with incised lines 2mm wide, filled with white and red paste. The decoration was repeated four times around the central hole. A triangular-shaped graffito was scratched on the reverse side of the object. It is interesting to note that similar triangular graffiti were found inscribed on the exterior of three shallow bowls (97-8, 97-9, 97-14; Anderson and Salaheldin Mohammed Ahmed 2002, 17, 20, 22) in el-Fereikha Tomb 5/97. Perhaps this mark was specific to the region and may have been used to denote ownership by a particular group or individual, or it may have had an apotropaic meaning. Analogous spindle whorls, though lacking the graffito, have been found for example, in the Meroe cemetery (Garstang *et al.* 1911, 47).

The associated wood traces ([^]99-9, Figures 7 and 11) were comprised of three segments which were brownish-red in colour and of a very powdery consistency, or were represented simply as negative impressions in the tomb floor. The longest fragment (1m x 80mm) was a negative impression running north east-south west. The middle section (480mm x 60mm) ran north-south and was largely a negative impression with some wood powder at the south end. The smallest, southern-most fragment (180mm x 80mm) was orientated north-south and bore traces of wood powder within an impression. It is possible the wood was from the remnants of a bed or a loom (based upon the close proximity to the spindle whorl), but due to the limited nature of the remains it was not possible to determine any original structure or features.

Beads ([^]99-3, 4, 5, 6, 7; Figures 7 and 15) formed the greatest number of finds within the tomb, numbering 161 in total. All were associated with the powdery remains of the individual that had laid closest to the north entrance, whereas the spindle whorl, wood fragments, libation bottle and bowl appear to have accompanied the individual laid in the southern part of the tomb (as determined by the distribution of bone powder). Bead types included turquoise-coloured cylindrical and round faience barrel beads, some of which displayed wear around the hole edges; small round yellow, light blue, black, brown and light green glass beads; light green cylindrical glass beads with flat ends; and round glass beads dark dusty-grey in colour. These latter beads are of interest as a bead of this type bore traces of gilding, suggesting that there had been several gilded beads included among the northern individual's adornments.

The development of the cemeteries

Beginning in 2003, rescue excavations were undertaken in the southernmost area of Wad Toum cemetery (WTC) (Figure 3), named after the adjacent Islamic cemetery, when Meroitic ceramics, human remains and

Object	Field number [^]	Dimensions (mm)	Description
Beads (8)	99-3	<p>a. L: 4.5-5; Th: 4; Hole D: 1.5-2</p> <p>b. L: 4; Th: 5; Hole D: 2</p> <p>c. D: 4; Th: 2; Hole D: 1</p> <p>d. D: 2; Th: 1; Hole D: 1</p>	<p>a. 5 cylindrical faience barrel beads, turquoise colour.</p> <p>b. 1 round faience bead, turquoise colour.</p> <p>c. 1 round glass disc bead, light green. Bead is lopsided with hole off-centre.</p> <p>d. 1 small light green, round glass disc bead.</p>
Beads (4)	99-4	<p>a. L: 5; D 4; Hole D: 2</p> <p>b. L: 4; Th: 4.5; Hole D: 2</p>	<p>a. 3 cylindrical faience barrel beads, turquoise colour.</p> <p>b. 1 cylindrical faience barrel bead, turquoise colour.</p>
Beads (74)	99-5	<p>a. L: 4.5-5; D: 4-4.5; Hole D: 2</p> <p>b. L: 6; D: 5; Hole D: 2</p> <p>c. D: 2; Th: 1; Hole D: 1</p> <p>d. D: 5; Th: 3.5; Hole D: 2</p> <p>D: 4; Th: 2.5; Hole D: 1</p> <p>D: 4; Th: 3; Hole D: 1</p> <p>e. D: 3.5; Th: 3; Hole D: 1-1.5</p>	<p>a. 22 cylindrical turquoise faience beads.</p> <p>b. 2 cylindrical turquoise faience barrel beads.</p> <p>c. 42 small round glass disc beads. 5 rust brown, 6 yellow, 31 light green</p> <p>d. 3 light green, cylindrical glass beads</p> <p>e. 5 round glass beads dark, dusty grey colour.</p>
Beads (74)	99-6	<p>a. L: 5; Th: 4; Hole D: 2</p> <p>b. D: 2; Th: 1; Hole D: 1</p> <p>c. D: 3; Hole D: 1; Th: 2.5</p>	<p>a. 16.5 cylindrical, turquoise faience barrel beads.</p> <p>b. 57 small round glass disc beads. 3 black, 2 light blue, 4 rust brown, 13 yellow, 35 light green.</p> <p>c. ½ bead, round glass disc, greyish brown. Traces of gilding.</p>
Beads (2)	99-7	<p>L: 5; Th: 4; Hole D: 2</p> <p>L: 6; Th: 4; Hole D: 2</p>	2 cylindrical turquoise-coloured faience barrel beads.

Figure 15. Beads from el-Fereikha 3/99. The following abbreviations are used: D - Diameter; Th - Thickness; L - Length.

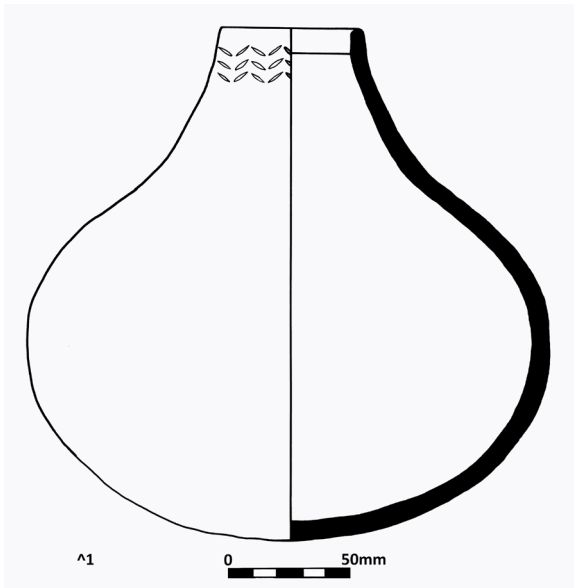


Figure 16. Libation bottle ^99-1.



Figure 17. Libation bottle ^99-1, reconstructed. White paste is visible in the incised decoration.

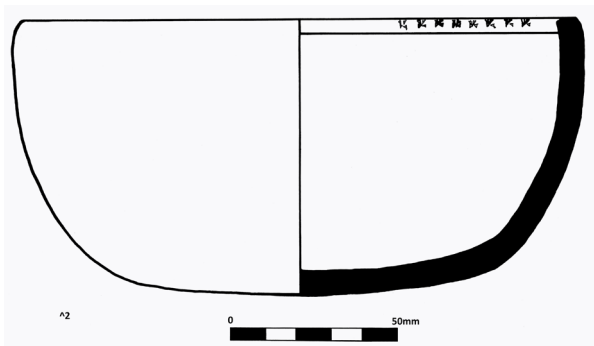


Figure 18. Bowl ^99-2.

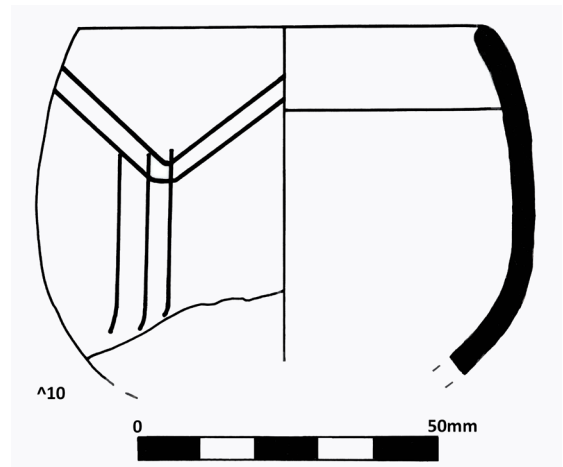


Figure 19. Cup ^99-10.

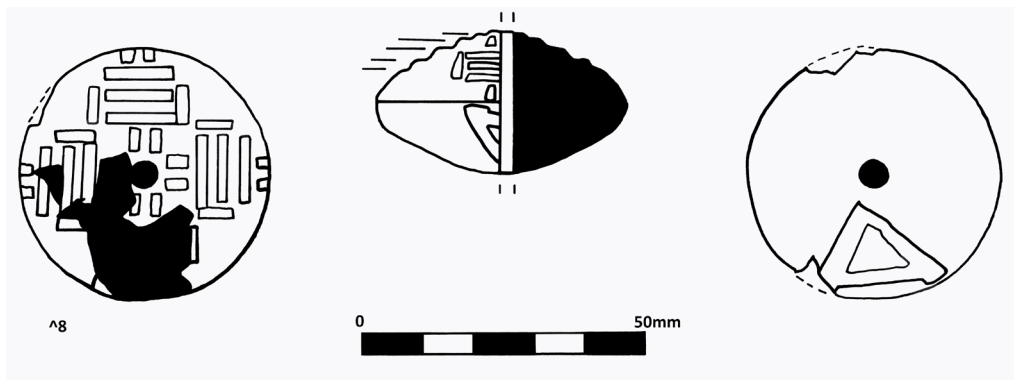


Figure 20. Spindle-whorl ^99-8, from left to right: obverse face; profile; reverse face.



Figure 21. Cemetery WTC, with white outline of tomb descendary visible, marked by the red dot.

fired brick fragments appeared in a drainage ditch dug beside the road. Local inhabitants also mentioned that such items appeared in the modern Islamic cemetery during its use. No evidence for superstructures were identified. Tomb descendaries were identified by removing c. 100mm of the overlying modern surface revealing the whitish outlines of the fills within them (Figure 21). The descendaries are inclined from east to west with the tomb chamber in the west, and are roughly triangular in shape. The eastern ends are slightly rounded. By 2016, 83 Meroitic graves had been excavated in WTC.⁷ A magnetometer survey running north-south was conducted on the western and southern sides of the modern Islamic cemetery in an attempt to determine the number of graves in the area and the cemetery boundaries.⁸ The survey covered 12,000 m² and numerous anomalies, probably tomb chambers, were visible (Figure 22).⁹

The el-Fereikha cemetery (FRC) consists of a series of low gravel mounds (c. 25m east-west by 200m north-south) running parallel to the Nile, west of the modern Islamic cemetery and north-west of WTC. Rescue excavations began here in 2014 after illicit digging was discovered. Meroitic sherds, an offering table, and fired brick fragments have been found on the surface. Excavations have revealed Meroitic, post-Meroitic and medieval Christian graves.¹⁰ Based on the current known distribution of graves across WTC, FRC and under el-Fereikha village (Figure 3) and the discovery of fragments of Christian tombstones, it

⁷Work in WTC has been under the direction of Salah Mohamed Ahmed and Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, with bioarchaeologists Anna Pieri and Mohamed Saad Abdalab. See Mahmoud Suliman Bashir and Anderson 2014; Anderson *et al.* 2014, 74-76; Anderson, Mahmoud Suliman Bashir and Rihab Khidir elRasheed 2015, 89-91; Anderson, Salah Mohammed Ahmed and Mahmoud Suliman 2015, 90-96; For a comparable Meroitic cemetery in nearby Berber see Mahmoud Suliman Bashir 2010; 2013.

⁸ The survey was directed by Mohamed Abdelwahab Mohamed-Ali from the Faculty of Earth Science and Mining, University of Dongola with assistance from Musaab Hussein Eltoum and Abdelhaleem Haroun Abou. A Geoscan Fluxgate Gradiometer (FM256) was used.

⁹ As initially reported in Anderson *et al.* 2014, 74-76.

¹⁰ See further Anderson, Mahmoud Suliman Bashir and Rihab Khidir elRasheed 2015, 89-91; Anderson *et al.* 2018, 113.

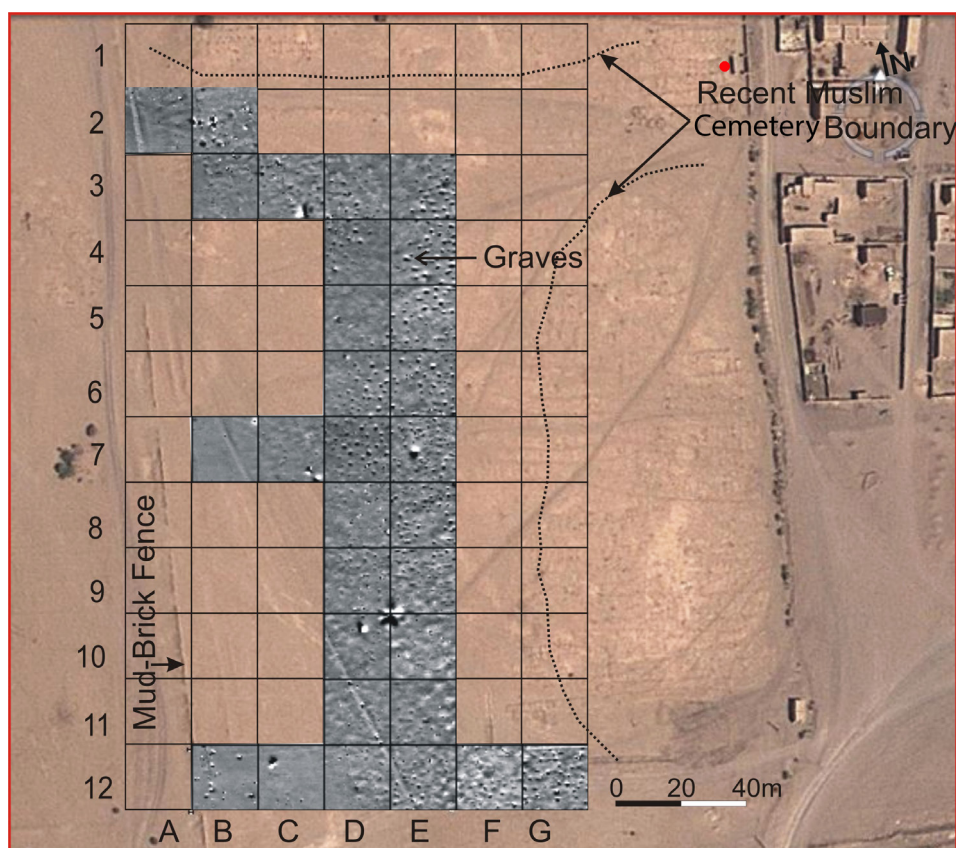


Figure 22. Geoscan fluxgate gradiometer (FM256) results in Cemetery WTC. The red dot shows the location of Tomb 3/99.

might be suggested that cemetery usage began during the Meroitic period in the WTC and FRC areas, then the focus shifted northward and the FRC and el-Fereikha village regions were used during the later post-Meroitic and medieval Christian periods. It is also interesting to note that thus far no post-Meroitic double descandary tombs such as 5/97 have been found in FRC. This type of grave may have been restricted to an elite part of the cemetery east of FRC, now largely beneath el-Fereikha village. That the area beside WTC and FRC remains in use as a cemetery attests to the chronological depth of the region's occupation.

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